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ABSTRACT

Raymond Yeager, director of forensics and professor of speech at Bowling Green State University, has reflected the best qualties which forensics as a discipline has contributed to education. As teacher and debate coach, Raymond Yeager believed that only through the rigors of competition would his students be able to acquire and develop the skills of analysis, research, organization, and presentation that would serve them in their later lives. Yeager maintained that it was the pursuit rather than the achievement of excellence that mattered most and that such an emphasis would not only permit more students to feel good about themselves and to appreciate the accomplishments of others, but also would lead them to greater achievement. As mentor and doctoral advisor, Raymond Yeager instructed students how to be understanding and to treat others in a kind and humane way, and how to accomplish what they really sought to do. (KEH)

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THE ART OF PERSUASION BEAUTIFUL AND JUST

PAPERS IN HONOR OF RAYMOND YEAGER

Seventy-Fifth Annual Meeting
Speech Communication Association
San Fransico, California
November 18-21, 1989

"Forensics: Our Contribution to Education"

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Honorable Panelists; Worthy Critics; Noble Chairman and time-keeper; Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am "pleased and proud" to be here today,

to discuss this "timely and worthy topic"

FORENSICS: OUR CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION

Before I begin my analysis, allow me two observations:

OBSERVATION ONE I am not Seth Hawkins!

However, as probably the last in a long line of forensics coaches trained by Dr. Raymond Yeager:

"including; but not limited to"

Bob and Rita Rosenthal, Dan and Rolayne DeStephen, Dennis and Leslie Wilson, Gary Eckles, Jim Sayer, Norb Mills, Craig Cutbirth, Charles Kneupper, Leanne Wolff, Janet Yerby; not to mention many of the other members of this panel:

Tom Hall, Jan Younger, Greg Gardner, Mabry O'Donnell...

Let me say what a privilege it is for me to be asked to fill-in for Professor Hawkins.

OBSERVATION TWO I am particularly pleased to be here

in San Fransico, for the presentation of this program. It was just a few miles from here, in Stockton, California, back in 1975, that Dr. Yeager and I brought the first team I ever coached, to the NDT.

I have been perhaps luckier than most of the others on my list of a moment ago, because my "forensics education' has been touched by Dr. Yeager in three very special and unique ways: not only was hé my teach, but he has also been my teaching mentor, and my academic advisor. The lessons he has taught me have been invaluable.

As a naive, young freshman at Bowling Green, back, in the spring of 1970, Dr. Yeager took me and three of my colleagues: Pam Spears, Mary Rolayne Smith, and my debate partner Dan DeStephen on a little bus trip to Pi Kappa Nationals in Houston - 26 hours on a

Greyhound - not that's a "road trip"! However, we were all uncertain of why "we" were going - there were others on the team who would obviously have had a far better chance of winning than us. But, Dr. Yeager told us not to worry. "Competing," he said, "is far more important than winning." Dr. Yeager has always believed, and still does, that only through the rigors of competition would we be able to acquire and develop the skills of analysis, research, organization, and presentation, that would serve us in our later lives. THe educational benefits of debate (and forensics) seem to be well documented. The author of a recent article in the journal of the American Forensic Association tended to agree with this: "improved communication skills; exposure to important social issues ... (and) improvement of critical thinking skills" he wrote are the clearest benefits of participation in intercollegiate debate. [JAFA, Spring 85, p. 238] For Dr. Yeager this has always been the most important educational aspect of forensics. It's our real contribution to education. And, he is not alone! According to Daniel Duke, the Director of Educational Administration at Lewis and Clark College, "(u)ltimately, it is the pursuit rather than the achievement of excellence that matters most. By nature, the achievement of true excellence in any area is limited to a relative few. Placing value on the pursuit of excellence permits more students to feel good about themselves and to appreciate the accomplishments of others. In the end, such an emphasis may even lead to great achievement." [Phi Delta Kappan, June, 85, p. 674]

That certainly was true for us. While Dan and I got trounced by the Houston team that won Nationals that year, we were able to win 6 of our 8 rounds and ultimately received a Certificate of Excellence. Pam and Rolayne didn't get a Certificate, but Rolayne eventually married Dan, so things did work out well in the long run. But, most importantly, we all got the chance to test ourselves against the best forensics had to offer, and we learned, first-hand, that we could develop these skills in ourselves, and in others as well.

This was not the only lesson I was to learn from Dr. Yeager, however! As a graduate assistant in the mid-seventies, I became part of what has come to be called, "The Trophy Trip". Truly a Bowling Green tradition worth having! As the coaching staff prepared for the onslought of tournaments B.G. would be hosting that year, Dr. Yeager would always be sure to set aside one afternoon, early in the fall quarter so we could all go to Toledo to "buy trophies". This particular "coaching seminar" usually included a stop at our favorite Chinese resturant for "moral strength". It was a time for the coaches to relax a bit, let down our guard, and express our feelings about the upcoming season. During one such excursion, I let it slip that I was afraid that our top debate team had evolved far beyond what I could offer them as a coach. I had even toyed with the idea of suggesting to them that they transfer to another institution, where the budget was bigger and they could get more "national exposure". As we were all leaving the resturant, flushed with more than just the glow of good Chinese food, Dr. Yeager pulled me aside and said, "wake up Ralph, coaching is more than just driving the bus!" For Dr. Yeager, forensic educators should be more than simple tacticans, they have to be friends. "As students grow and mature in the activity," he said, "they should come to reflect more than just the ability to read briefs faster than the next guy. They have to come to reflect the care and nurturing of an environment that treats them like real human beings." Former University of Virginia Director of Debate John Graham concurred. "Few activities," he wrote, reveal such varied results for any student so quickly and so nakedly as does debate (and forensics), no matter how great or small the student's talents. It is not a game or an exercise, but a thought process which illuminates, supports, and nurtures...." [JAFA, Sept., '65, p. 94]

Again, Dr. Yeager knew what he was talking about. That team I was so worried about stayed at B.G., and together we developed a lasting friendship. They won three major tournaments that spring, earned a second round bid to Nationals - the one here in California - and went on to be the top-seeded team at Districts the following year. One of them, George

Thompson, now works for the Brookings Institution, translating Russian technical journals into English. And the other, David Harrison, is an attorney in Atlanta. They both turned out to be pretty nice guys, too! Proving once again that there is life after debate, and debaters can be "real people" too.

But, probably Dr. Yeager's greatest contribution to MY forensics education came from his stint as my doctoral advisor. As one of those "young turks" in debate, you are always hearing about, I was going to produce the world's greatest forensics dissertation. It was going to be a mighty study, a powerful critique, and an intellectual, as well as educational, triumph! Well, after collecting over 5000 ballots from tournaments around the country and crunching numbers night and day in the computer for more than a week, I got back what can only be described as "goop". I was ready to call it quits, chuck it all in Poe Ditch, and go be a "debate groupie" for some high school. But, Dr. Yeager wouldn't let me. He said I had come too far, learned too much, to throw it all away.

He told me to look around for an issue I could call my own. One that <u>needed</u> to be discussed; an argument whose analysis might contribute to general knowledge and the "public good". It took me a while, and I committed the cardinal sin of graduate school - I left ABD - but, I didn't give up on myself. And, while it is true that Dr. Yeager had already retired before I returned to B.G. to defend my dissertation in the summer of 1981 - a mere month before my "window of opportunity" would have closed - I am proud to say that Dr. Yeager was there for me at my orals, just as he had always been before. I am also proud to say that I am now one of the very few graduate students in Bowling Green's history to ever have six names on the title page of my dissertation - instead of only five.

So, what can we say about the contributions of forensics to education? Well, I for one, can only say, <u>"THANKS"</u>: to a coach who taught me how to think critically, analize thoroughly, and communicate effectively; to a mentor who taught me how to be understanding and treat

others in a kind and humane way; and, to an advisor who taught me what I can do if I really want to, so long as I know in my heart the real reasons why. THANKS Dr. Yeager, for reflecting the best qualities which this discipline has to offer.

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